

The United Nations Organisation (UN)

Aims

The United Nations Organisation (UN) was set up following World War II in 1945 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to reaffirm human rights'. The UN tries to get co-operation between countries to achieve international peace. It also tries to ensure that human rights and freedom from discrimination and abuse are given to all peoples and nations through a system of international justice. It tries to help poorer countries develop through its specialist agencies.

The Security Council

The really important part of the UN, where decisions about peacekeeping are taken, is the Security Council. It has fifteen members of which the most important are the five permanent members: USA, Russia, UK, France and China. The other ten places are changed every two years to allow the less powerful countries some say. Each of the 'Big Five' has a veto (which means 'I forbid'). The veto was often used during the Cold War by the USSR or the USA to block a policy they did not like.

Funding the UN

Member countries of the UN are supposed to pay contributions according to their size. Most are not up to date with their payments. The USA is the largest single contributor to the cost of the UN; though in recent years it has refused to pay its contribution in full as America's leaders think the UN wastes money and often criticises US foreign policy. However, since the new Secretary General has been trying to make the UN more efficient and has cut back on the 25,000 staff around the world, the US has agreed to pay its share in full. However, nearly \$2 billion used to pay for UN peacekeeping mission remains unpaid by several UN members.

The cost of the growing number of peacekeeping operations is increasing every year but it is far cheaper than war. There are nearly 100 000 UN staff operating around the globe including more than 82 000 troops, 14 000 UN police and 3 000 military observers. The approved UN peacekeeping budget for 2010-11 was nearly \$7.2 billion - this amount has risen sharply since 2000 however it represents less than 1% of global military spending. The five permanent members of the Security Council pay about 60% of peacekeeping costs. The USA should pay half of this.

Reforming the UN

The Security Council is not representative of the world today and has been a topic debated in the UN since early 1990s. It is dominated by the USA, the world's superpower, which has the military power to take action anywhere in the world of its own accord. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was opposed by many UN members. Germany, Japan and India now have strong claims to be permanent members of the Security Council as they are some of the strongest economies and fastest growing populations in the world. Some have argued that the current make up does not reflect the world of today. Suggestions have included a seat in the Security Council to represent regional alliances such as the European Union or African Union. Unsurprisingly, permanent members are not keen to see their current powers diluted in any way.

UN peacekeeping

The success of UN peacekeeping often depends on the attitude of the most powerful countries, especially the USA.

Before the UN can try to solve a conflict, the Security Council must agree a policy. It has a number of options:

- Send negotiators or observers to the country.
- Impose sanctions.
- Send a peacekeeping force.

- Agree military intervention.

Sending negotiators or observers

This is the most likely policy. However, as the UN has no weapons, it can only function if both sides in a conflict genuinely want a settlement. The UN has been present in the Middle East for years but the Arab-Israeli dispute is still unresolved. There are more than 2000 UN military observers active throughout the world.

Imposing sanctions

The UN can also impose sanctions to try to force a country to agree to UN Resolutions. When Iraq was not prepared to allow inspectors to check its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, sanctions were imposed preventing it from selling its oil. The problem with sanctions is that they can be easily avoided and take a long time to work. In the case of Iraq, they hurt ordinary people who were not able to obtain food and medical supplies while Saddam Hussein and his forces were not really affected. Sanctions have been imposed recently on Iran over their development of nuclear weapons however it has long been felt that sanctions from organisations like the EU are more severe than those imposed by the UN.

Peacekeeping

A peacekeeping force may be sent to 'police' a peace settlement. Member countries must agree to supply forces and their equipment but this may be difficult because political leaders don't want to send their forces into danger areas where they have no political or trade interests. This has been the case in Africa. If serious fighting breaks out, such as in Rwanda, the UNO force is usually too small to stop it and withdraws. Equally the UN may not have the money to send and equip forces unless a powerful country like the USA gets involved.

In some situations, certain forces are not acceptable as they are not seen as neutral. This has often ruled out USA or Russia from intervening when Israel and her Arab neighbours have been in conflict. This is why neutral countries such as Ireland, Canada, India and New Zealand are often asked to send forces to trouble 'spots'. Some developing countries' forces are so badly trained and equipped that they are not able to help effectively, such as when Bangladeshi troops were sent to Bosnia.